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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003370

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN "SECRET" TALKS IN ROME: AN
EXAMPLE OF TRACK II DIPLOMACY

CLASSIFIED BY: ACTING POL MC GARY ROBBINS FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: THE MAYOR OF ROME FACILITATED SEVERAL
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MEETINGS BETWEEN THE ISRAELI URI SAVIR AND THE PALESTINIAN
ABU ALA LAST YEAR IN ROME. THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT WAS NOT
AWARE OF THESE MEETINGS BUT IS ALSO NOT UNDULY CONCERNED
ABOUT THEM. THESE MEETINGS, UNOFFICIAL IN NATURE, PRODUCED A
"ROME UNDERSTANDING", WHICH WAS EVENTUALLY REJECTED BY PM
SHARON. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) POLOFF DISCUSSED WITH OFER BAVLY, THE SPOKESMAN OF THE
EMBASSY OF ISRAEL IN ROME, THE NEWS THAT BROKE IN THE ITALIAN
PRESS JULY 8 OF "SECRET" TALKS LAST YEAR BETWEEN SAVIR AND
ABU ALA IN ROME. BAVLY SAID THE ITALIAN MEDIA OVERPLAYED THE
IMPORTANCE OF THE ROME MEETINGS. SAVIR AND ABU ALA WORKED
TOGETHER ON THE OSLO ACCORD AND ARE "GOOD FRIENDS", HE SAID.
THEY MEET FREQUENTLY IN DIFFERENT PLACES IN THE WORLD, NOT
JUST IN ROME. THEY BOTH ASKED MAYOR VELTRONI TO ARRANGE
"SECRET" MEETINGS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE, BASED ON THEIR
EXPERIENCE IN OSLO, THAT TALKS ARE MOST PRODUCTIVE WHEN MEDIA
PRESSURE IS ABSENT. SAVIR IS A LONG-TIME FRIEND AND
CONSULTANT OF FM PERES. (NOTE: SAVIR BECAME DG OF THE ISRAELI
MFA AT THE AGE OF 39. HE LATER BECAME THE PRESIDENT OF THE
PERES CENTER FOR PEACE. HE IS NOW IN PRIVATE BUSINESS AND
DIVIDES HIS TIME BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ITALY. END NOTE.) EVEN
THOUGH PERES WAS AWARE OF THESE CONTACTS, STRESSED BAVLY,
SAVIR IS NOT AN ISRAELI GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL AND THUS ANY
MEETINGS HE HAS DO NOT CONSTITUTE AN OFFICIAL CONTACT WITH
THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROME
UNDERSTANDING, WHICH WAS TO BEGIN WITH A CEASE-FIRE FOLLOWED
BY MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN STATES AND
SUBSEQUENT BORDER NEGOTIATIONS, WAS REJECTED BY SHARON.
BAVLY ADDED THAT, CONTRARY TO WHAT SOME MAY EXPECT, THE
EXPOSURE OF THE SAVIR-ABU ALA ROME MEETINGS HAS RECEIVED
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LITTLE COVERAGE IN THE ISRAELI PRESS.

[1](#)3. (C) POLOFF ALSO SPOKE WITH PAOLO DIONISI, DEPUTY
DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR FOR PM AND ACTING FM BERLUSCONI. DIONISI
SAID THAT THE MEETINGS BETWEEN SAVIR AND ABU ALA WERE NOT
OFFICIAL IN NATURE AND THAT THE GOI WAS NEVER INFORMED OF
THEM. ROME, ADDED DIONISI, IS A NATURAL CHOICE FOR SUCH
MEETINGS GIVEN ITS GEOGRAPHICAL PROXIMITY TO THE MIDDLE EAST,
THE GOOD RELATIONS THAT THE MAYOR OF ROME HAS WITH BOTH SAVIR
AND ABU ALA, AND THE EASE WITH WHICH SUCH MEETINGS COULD GO
UNNOTICED IN A CITY THAT SERVES AS HOME AND TRANSIT POINT FOR
THOUSANDS OF DIPLOMATS AND PUBLIC FIGURES.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: THE "SECRET" TALKS IN ROME BETWEEN SAVIR AND
ABU ALA ARE AN EXAMPLE OF TRACK II DIPLOMACY BETWEEN TWO
PEOPLE WHO WORKED WELL TOGETHER IN OSLO AND ARE REPORTEDLY
CLOSE FRIENDS. THE MAYOR OF ROME PROTECTED THE "SECRECY" OF
THE TALKS TO HONOR SAVIR AND ABU ALA'S WISHES, AND POSSIBLY
ALSO IN THE HOPE OF EVENTUALLY EARNING DOMESTIC AND
INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION IF THE TALKS BORE FRUIT. END
COMMENT.

[1](#)5. (SBU) BIO NOTE: ROME'S MAYOR WATER VELTRONI IS A LONG-TERM
CENTER-LEFT POLITICIAN, AND SERVED AS DEPUTY PM IN THE PRODI
GOVERNMENT (1996). HE HAS EXTENSIVE INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS,
INCLUDING THE TWO PARTICIPANTS IN THE TALKS. HE CONTINUES TO
HOLD AMBITIONS FOR HIGH-LEVEL NATIONAL OFFICE, SHOULD ITALY'S
CENTER-LEFT AGAIN BE IN A POSITION TO WIN THE CONFIDENCE OF
ITALY'S ELECTORATE. END BIO NOTE.
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